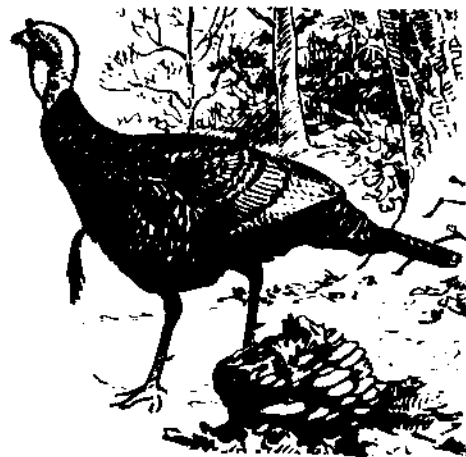


# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

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# TURKEY



## In the State of Washington

The Merriam's turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo merriami*, is Washington's newest game bird. A native of southwestern United States, it was first introduced into Stevens County in 1960 and 1961. As this population prospered, surplus birds were trapped and transplanted to other parts of the state. Established populations now exist in southern Spokane County, Douglas County, the Blue Mountains, and several locations on the eastern slopes of the Cascades. The first open hunting season was declared in 1965 and open seasons have been held annually since.

The Merriam's turkey is our largest game bird, with mature toms averaging about 20 pounds. Hens and juveniles are much smaller. It is a streamlined version of the domestic turkey but has buff colored tips on the tail feathers and upper tail coverts instead of white.

Mating is polygamous. Each tom tries to attract as many hens as possible to his territory, often as many as 15, which he defends from other gobblers. Young toms do not ordinarily mate until their second year. Interbreeding with domestic turkeys is common.

Turkeys nest on the ground, usually near an opening in the forest. The nest, lined with leaves and grass, is well hidden by thick low-growing vegetation. An average clutch contains ten or eleven eggs, which hatch in 28 days. The young are called poults.

## HABITAT NEEDS

Food. Turkeys eat a wide variety of nuts, seeds, fruits, tubers, greens, and insects. Cultivated grains such as oats, wheat, and barley are preferred and the best turkey populations are near such grain fields. Acorns and pine seeds are choice foods. Bearberry, blackberry, huckleberry, snowberry, serviceberry, chokecherry, and rose hips are eagerly taken as are leaves of many grasses and forbs. Grasshoppers are a choice animal food. Turkey poults eat as many insects, snails, and spiders as they can find.

Cover. Turkeys need forest cover, preferably pine or oak, which also provides food. An open understory is necessary. Young birds prefer to feed in brushy areas where they have protection from predators. Low-growing brush also supplies nesting cover. Roosting is in trees, usually the tallest one in the vicinity.

Water is needed daily. Turkeys will not remain in an area which does not have water available within the birds' daily cruising radius of one to two miles.

#### LAND MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

Increase choice foods by planting grass, oats, wheat, barley, or legumes for seasonal use. Manage woodlands by regulating grazing, thinning, and brush control to increase native turkey foods and provide better feeding conditions.

Leave food-producing trees and shrubs when conducting thinning and brush control operations.

Provide water by means of ponds, spring developments, or wildlife watering facilities.

Protect roosting trees.

Turkeys are easily over-hunted. Adjust the harvest to only one-third of the fall populations, or less, if you wish to increase the numbers.